How To Survive A Sniper Attack:

Most survival groups have some type of retreat defense plan worked out for use in a long-term survival scenario, in case they are attacked by people who want to steal their supplies, or take over their retreat. A viable plan will include selecting a remote retreat site, blocking road access to that site, building fighting positions, clearing fields of fire, creating barriers to channel attackers into kill zones, removing features that attackers can use for cover, making up range cards for each fighting position, manning a continuous observation post to watch for intruders, and practicing how to respond to the different types of attack which a retreat group is most likely to face.

The one type of attack that survivalists tend to worry about the most is a sniper attack, and this is a valid concern.

This article is intended to guide you through the steps you should take in advance, to prepare your group mentally and physically, both to survive such an attack, and to mount an effective defense against your attackers.

Even if attackers use poor tactics (like standing in the open), you still need an effective response plan to deal with them.

Some survival-minded people believe that you will be safer from sniper attacks in long-term disasters if you choose to live inside a small town, rather than establishing an isolated retreat, but I disagree. The basic problem is that sniper tactics are just as effective against the residents of a small town, as they are against the occupants of an isolated retreat. Any desperate person or group who finds your small town or retreat during a long-term disaster may be tempted to try to kill you and your friends, so they can take the results of your hard work and planning for themselves. If they happen to be armed with a scoped rifle, then the easiest way to accomplish their goal is by using sniper tactics. Consider that it costs the sniper very little to make the attempt (just a handful of cartridges). They do not need to expose themselves to launch an attack, but can shoot from several hundred yards away. If the attack fails, a sniper can usually withdraw without being spotted, and return to try again another day. If they succeed, the reward is everything they can steal from their dead victims. Being in a small town will not change this unpleasant fact. While having more people around provides the same type of protection that a fish has when swimming in a school of similar fish, there are many potential problems that trying to defend a small town can cause, which I think more than negate this one advantage.

An adequate sniper defense requires prior planning, modifying your behavior to make targeting your group harder, constructing defensive positions, and training your people how to respond effectively to attacks. In my experience, adding more people to your group (especially small-town folk who may not share your survival philosophy, and who will not have your experience and knowledge base) tends to result in needless arguments, resistance to the work needed to achieve the necessary security measures, and attempts to out-vote you on critical life and death issues. Even the smallest town will be harder to defend than a well-designed retreat. Also consider that every small town is clearly located on road maps and road signs, that towns always have roads which lead directly to them, and that the town's residents themselves can turn against you, or against each other.

Types of snipers: There are four basic types of snipers that your group may have to defend against. You may not have the luxury of knowing which type you are up against when attacked, but it is worthwhile to describe the four kinds, so that you can evaluate the threat each may present, and make sure that your response plan is adequate for each type. Of course these are generalizations; your attackers may vary. (Please note that you should always assume there are two or more attackers, so that you stay in your defensive operating mode, even after you are certain your group has eliminated the first sniper. Don't be in any hurry to expose yourself!)

The first type of sniper is what I call the chance predator. This is an inexperienced amateur who may wind up as a refugee in your area after the crisis. They have a scoped rifle, but no formal training; in other words they have little or no prior knowledge of riflecraft, or combat tactics. They will probably not have camo clothing, and may not carry much ammo. This type of attacker will be the easiest to spot, they will be more dangerous at closer ranges, and this is the type that you are statistically most likely to encounter. Their lack of survival skills may make them extremely desperate, and an amateur can kill you just as dead as a professional, so don't underestimate the threat from this type. The average person seems to have no trouble justifying bad behavior to themselves, especially in a crisis, and now entire generations have been brought up to believe that the world owes them a living, that the end justifies the means, and that morality is relative, so extended disasters may bring out the worst in these types.

Snipers with hunting experience are more dangerous than chance predators, but also less likely to be encountered.

The second type of sniper is those who have some hunting experience. Many will be accurate with their weapons, making them dangerous at greater ranges. They may also have camo clothing, hearing amplifiers, night vision gear, or laser rangefinders. There are roughly 14 million hunters in the US, which is one out of every 20 people, so you are less likely to encounter a hunter than a chance predator. Most hunters have some survival skills, and are more capable of providing for themselves, so they are less likely to be driven by sheer desperation. This is the logistical trade-off that you will see as we go down the list; the less likely encounters will also be the more dangerous.

This is good news, as the most likely attacks can be countered, if you develop and practice a viable response plan.

The third type of sniper is those who are part of a criminal gang. Gangs of criminals will almost always have more than one weapon, with multiple shooters available for each rifle. Gangs may also have military weapons, perhaps stolen from an armory. Accuracy will vary considerably, and clothing may range from standard gang attire, to stolen civilian clothes. How likely having an encounter with this type of group will be, mainly depends on how far away your retreat is from the nearest prison, or large population center. Most gangs are more likely to attack in force, or try to rush in for a fast, up-close attack. They are also more likely to attempt ambush ploys, or use hostages and human shields. Tactics mainly depend on the experience level of the gang leader. This means that a sniper attack by a criminal gang is less likely, but you will be in defensive mode for a long time if one does occur. The most probable scenario would be for your group to repel one of the more common types of gang attack, only to have the survivors regroup, and then return and try using sniper tactics against you. The lesson here is to use a harsh military strategy; don't let any attackers escape if you can prevent it.

Criminal gangs have the ability to use sniper tactics, but are less likely to do so than other threat groups.

The good news is that a large gang is much easier to spot than a lone sniper or two, so you may have plenty of warning if a criminal gang starts operating in your area. If you have selected a good, well-isolated location, it is less likely that a gang will head your way. Most criminals have the bully mindset, and killing a few often convinces the rest to flee. I also think that most criminals would not be willing to clear roadblocks, or abandon their vehicles, to scout for potential targets. Of course if you are located in a small town, you are on the map, and there are plenty of road signs to helpfully tell every looter just how far away your little town is (hint hint).

The fourth type of sniper is the professional; those with military (or police) sniper training and experience. This type will be extremely difficult or even impossible to spot, as they usually wear a special type of camouflage called a ghille suit, a mass of cloth strips which completely obscure the human outline. Since professionals spend a lot of time practicing sneaking up on their targets, the first sign of a professional sniper attack may well be seeing a group member fall over, then hearing a gunshot shortly afterwards. Professionals are dangerous at ranges from 500 to 1000 yards when armed with .30 caliber rifles, and could attack from as far away as one-half mile to one mile, if armed with a .50 caliber rifle. An attack of this type qualifies as a survivalist's worst nightmare.

Professionally trained snipers are the most dangerous, but also the least likely to be encountered.

The good news is that professional snipers are a very tiny minority of the population, so this is the least likely type of attack you might face, and even a pro sniper attack is survivable, if you develop and practice your response plan. Also consider that even if an attacker has military training, they may not have their normal sniper weapons and equipment with them. Had they been prepared and well equipped, they probably would not be out trying to take over someone else's retreat. If they made the mistake of getting caught unprepared to survive, then they may be prone to make other mistakes, as well. This means that your odds of successfully spotting and defeating them may be greater than you would otherwise expect.

How snipers use camouflage: It turns out that the human face is the easiest shape for people to recognize, to the point that we see “faces” in things like wood grain, or in cloud patterns. The shape of human hands, and the general outline of the human body, are nearly as easy for people to spot, and we are also very good at detecting movement. To counter these normal abilities and avoid detection, well-trained snipers cover the entire face with a sniper’s veil, cover the entire body with a ghille suit, cover their weapon with a camo net or ghille strips, build hidden sniper’s nests, practice holding still and moving very slowly, and attack from as far away as is practical. Your group needs to be familiar with these standard sniper tactics, to understand what they may be up against.

Notice how easy it is to recognize the human face, even when camouflage face paint is applied to it.

Defense Plan: An effective sniper defense plan has two basic parts; standard precautions, and response plans. Standard precautions are proactive defense measures which will help to protect you from any type of attack, including sniper attacks. These are normal defense tactics, which need to become an everyday part of life at your retreat. Response plans are the pre-arranged actions each group member will take as soon as an attack is detected. It is not enough to develop these plans; everyone in your group needs to practice your response plans, until the correct responses become second nature to them. You won’t have time to explain things when an attack occurs.

Even a partially exposed face, exposed hands, or a single exposed eye can be detected by the normal human senses.

Standard Precautions: These are the basic standard precautions; Owning and developing proficiency with a scoped rifle suitable for counter-sniper use (and having a good supply of ammo for it), Building and manning a round the clock observation post, Constructing fighting positions, Making range cards for each fighting position, Reducing available cover for the enemy, Digging crawl trenches to connect your retreat buildings to your observation and fighting positions (and to each other), Setting up an alarm and communication system to alert your group when intruders are spotted (or if an attack occurs), and Reducing your visibility profile.

A sniper's veil completely covers all facial features, and ghille suits break up the human outline. An exposed weapon is also easy to spot, so they are normally covered by camouflage netting, or ghille strips.

With the appropriate camouflage, snipers can blend in with desert terrain, snowy conditions, and woodland environments.

A well-camouflaged sniper can be very difficult to spot, even when standing in the open.

Rifles: Because most snipers will attack from as far away as is practical, you need to own a rifle which is lethal at those same distances, in order to be able to fight back. A fifty caliber rifle would be the weapon of choice, but they are expensive, the ammo is also costly, and they have been banned in some states. The next best choice is a thirty caliber rifle. I prefer military surplus bolt-action rifles, such as the Russian Mosin-Nagant (7.62 x 54R), or the British Enfield (.303 british). Military surplus rifles have many survival-oriented design features that sporting rifles do not, and they have been tested on the battlefield in actual combat conditions. The fact that these guns are also the cheapest thirty caliber weapons you can get is another important selling point. Since you should have a suitable counter-sniper gun for every capable member of your retreat group, this is the least expensive way in which you can meet that need. Your rifle must be equipped with a suitable scope, such as a 6-20 x 50 variable power scope. Installing a scope mount on these bolt-action rifles either requires having a gunsmith modify the bolt handle so that it is bent (otherwise the scope mount will block the bolt handle), or you can buy a scope mount which replaces the rear sight on the Mosin-Nagant, keeping the scope forward of the bolt. (You must use an unusual shooting position, to use this arrangement with a standard rifle scope, so it works better with long eye relief scopes.)

The Mosin Nagant 91/30 bolt-action rifle (7.62 x 54R) is a very accurate 30 caliber rifle that sells for around $100 to $150. You could buy ten of these for the price of one assault rifle, and they are accurate enough to be used as sniper rifles. Though mounting a scope on these rifles is a somewhat awkward task, it's well worth the effort, given the exceptional long-range accuracy potential. An easier way to mount your scope, which requires no gunsmithing, and avoids having to replace the bolt handle with a bent one, is to buy a scope mount which replaces the rear sight, and then add a pistol scope with long eye relief, giving you a poor-man's scout rifle. You can get one of these type of scope mounts, from crankyfarmer.com.

Close-up of Mosin bolt action.

The 7.62 x 54R cartridge.

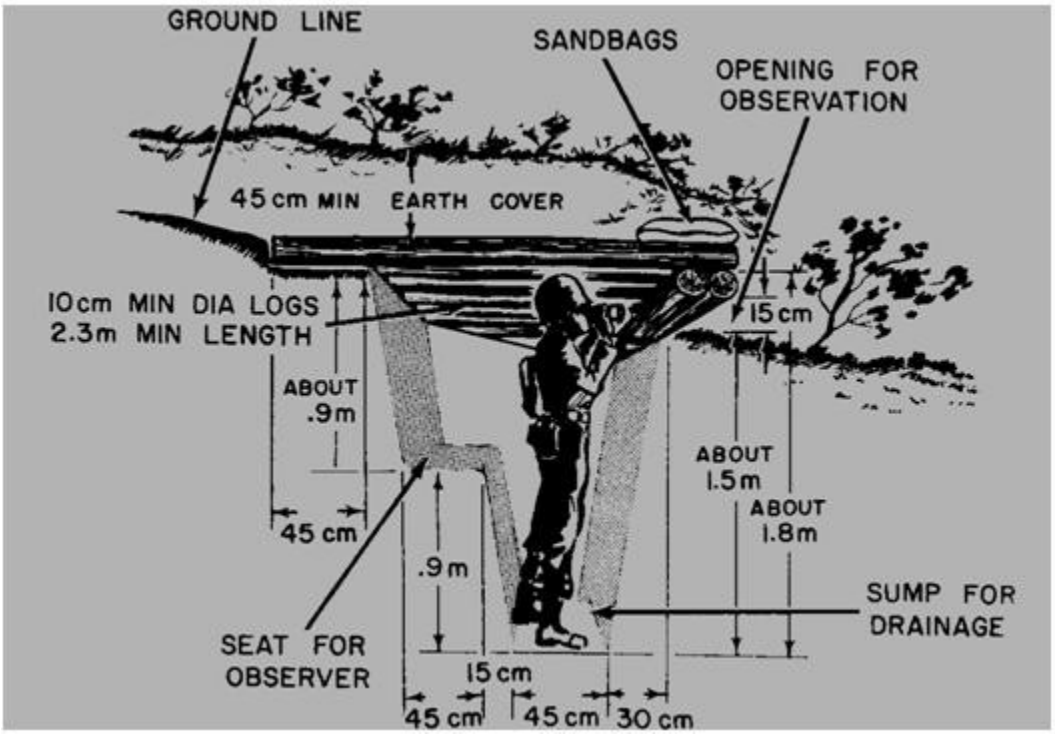
Mosin-Nagant with rear sight scope mount.

Please note that rifles of less than thirty caliber do not have the ability to consistently deliver lethal damage at extended sniper ranges. This is a simple matter of physics, as smaller bullets lose more energy at greater ranges. A . 223 may be able to hit a target at 500 yards, but you can't depend on it to kill at that distance. This means that rifles such as the Mini 14, or M-16, are not suited for the counter-sniper role, and ignoring this fact can have grave consequences where your defense is concerned. Look at it this way; no army equips its snipers or counter-snipers with smaller caliber weapons, for the same reasons we just mentioned, so why should your group do so?

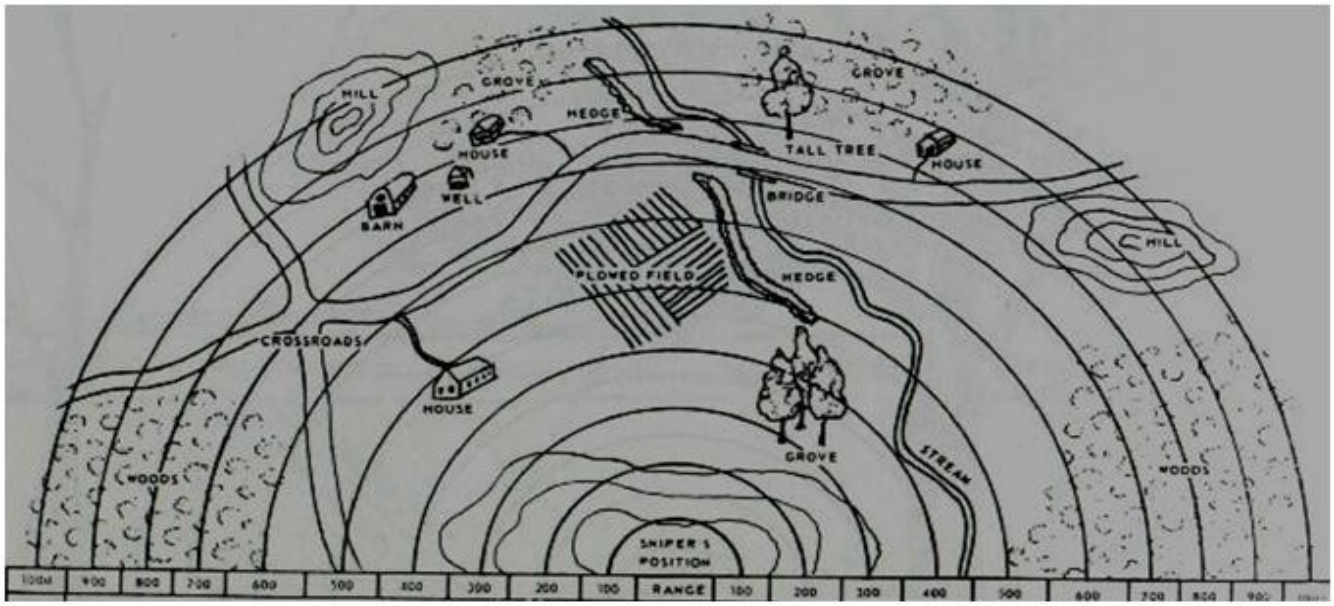
British Enfield bolt-action rifles (.303 british), and one type of enfield scope mount.

Once you have acquired a suitable rifle, your group members must practice hitting man-sized targets at extended ranges. Start with 100 yards, and then go up to 200, 300, 400, and 500. Once you can consistently hit your target at the 500 yard range, you will be able to deal with 90 per cent of your potential sniper problems.

Observation Post / Counter-Sniper Post: The first defensive position your group should construct as part of your standard precautions is an observation post. This position will be used to watch for intruders, and to try to spot snipers if you are attacked, while allowing you to remain concealed in both cases.



This is the basic design for a concealed observation post with overhead cover. It also makes an ideal counter-sniper position, with minimal modifications. Not shown are side entrance with covered crawl trench access, gear and ammo storage, and communication equipment. This post should be located on high ground, and positioned so that it can be used to keep watch over your retreat. It should have the best possible views of approaches to your retreat, and of the retreat area itself, so that they can be covered with protective counter-sniper fire. It is almost always easier to defend a retreat from a position like this, rather than by fighting from inside the retreat building.



Here is an example of a completed range card, showing the view from the firing port, with each terrain feature mapped out.

Range Card: Any fighting or observation position will be more effective if you make a diagram, called a range card, of the entire area that can be seen from the firing port, showing the distance to each terrain feature, such as roads, buildings, streams, ponds, fences, barriers, anti-personnel traps, and other landmarks, for easy reference during combat. These features can also be painted on a sheet of plywood, or on the wall by the observation port.

The observation post is improved by constructing it with a sleeping trench, and room for a portable toilet, and should have several day's worth of food and water stored inside, because you never know how long a counter-sniper operation will last. The observation port must be camouflaged, because snipers will be looking for you while you are trying to spot them. A curtain of camo netting is a good way to hide the opening, but you can also plant grass or brush in front of it, and keep the plants thinned down enough to see through, while staying hidden from view yourself. The overhead cover of this position should keep observers shaded most of the time, but be careful to avoid reflecting light from scopes or binoculars, if the sun shines into the opening in the morning or evening.

A crawl trench leading to your observation post should be made with overhead cover, to help keep it hidden.

Crawl Trench: Another important design feature is digging a crawl trench that connects your observation post to your retreat buildings. The trench should be covered, for better concealment. A hidden way to reach your observation post is vital, as being seen running to the post during an attack will give away its location to the enemy, and lose the element of surprise that can make a critical difference in your defense plans.

Warning and Alert devices: An effective defense plan must include methods for communication between group members. You will need to be able to sound an alert if intruders are spotted, or if your group comes under attack, and it is best if you develop a primary signaling system, and also one or more emergency backup methods.

Electrical alerts include two-way radios, surplus field phones, and Mallory sonalert buzzers.

Electrical Alerts: The most convenient communication system is modern 2-way radios, but they become useless when you run out of batteries, so stocking up on extras is advisable. CB radios can also be used. Any radio can be eavesdropped on, but being overheard doesn't negate the advantage of being able to coordinate your defense properly. Military surplus field phones require a 2-conductor telephone wire to connect them, and surplus stores which sell the phones usually have quarter-mile spools of the wire for sale. These phones usually have a crank mechanism to make the phone at the other end of the wire ring, and some also use D-cell batteries.

Having a pair of these phones connecting your observation post with the primary retreat building is a good idea. You can also improvise field phones from old telephone handsets, a couple of extra switches and buzzers, and a battery and telephone wire, if you have basic electronic skills. Another way is to wire positions in your retreat with a simple, commercially-made intercom system (Wireless intercoms may not be able to transmit between foxholes, so use a wired intercom system, if you go this route). Another simple alert can be made by wiring switches in your defensive positions to Mallory sonalert buzzers in the retreat buildings, foxholes, and other strategic areas.

Manual alerts include steel triangles, loud whistles, and refillable air horns (this one comes with it's own pump).

Manual Alerts: More primitive, manual alerts include things like steel triangles (the kind used to call ranch hands in for dinner). Gongs like these have been improvised from pipe (usually bent into a "U" shape), empty artillery shell casings, and even gas cylinders with the bottom cut away. (Gongs have to be hung from a rope or chain, so that they can ring correctly.) There are also a number of very loud whistles available for sale, such as the storm whistle. This is a good item to acquire for each group member. You can also buy small air horns powered by cans of compressed air, including some refillable versions, which come with a small air pump for recharging them.

These manual noise-makers have one disadvantage; the enemy will also be able to hear them. They are still necessary, however, because you may need to get the attention of group members who are outside working, so they can respond to the intrusion. If you don't have radio, this is the next best method. Also, there is a simple manual alert system that you can improvise out of common materials, which uses no electricity, and which can sound alarms inside your buildings or fighting positions, without alerting the whole neighborhood. It consists of a noisemaker in the retreat (which can be as simple as several tin cans hung together on strings) connected to a pull handle in the observation post. The two are connected by a rope, cord, or wire that is run through a length of PVC pipe, garden hose, conduit, or even sections of bamboo, buried a few inches deep, in a line between the two positions. If you made a crawl trench connecting your retreat and observation post, the rope can just be strung through the crawl trench, preferably through pulleys or eye bolts. The group member who spots an intruder pulls the alarm handle, to rattle the noisemakers in the retreat (this system can be improved with a spring on each end of the rope). These simple alarms can be run between any two points, and you can use whatever type of noisemakers you have available. This way the noise is confined inside of your positions, while still being effective as an alert.

You will also need to develop a few code signals to use with any of these manual alerts. This should be kept as simple as possible, such as one repeated sound for intruder spotted, two quick repeated sounds for under attack, and three quick repeated sounds for need help. All group members need to be familiar with and practice using your primary and backup communication systems, before they are needed.

Reducing Your Visibility Profile: This means making sure your group avoids activities which make them into good targets. There are three main areas of interest here, clothing, cover from sight, and light security.

Clothing: First, avoid wearing clothes that do not blend with the natural environment. To butcher an old joke, you don't have to wear camo to work here, but it helps. Your group should choose subdued, drab colors, and camo is even better, but the main point is to avoid anything that stands out. This includes shiny objects, which can turn you into a walking signal mirror. Don't forget snow camo for winter conditions, or at least extra bedsheets to improvise some. (You should also keep your vehicles and buildings as subdued as possible, for the same reasons.)

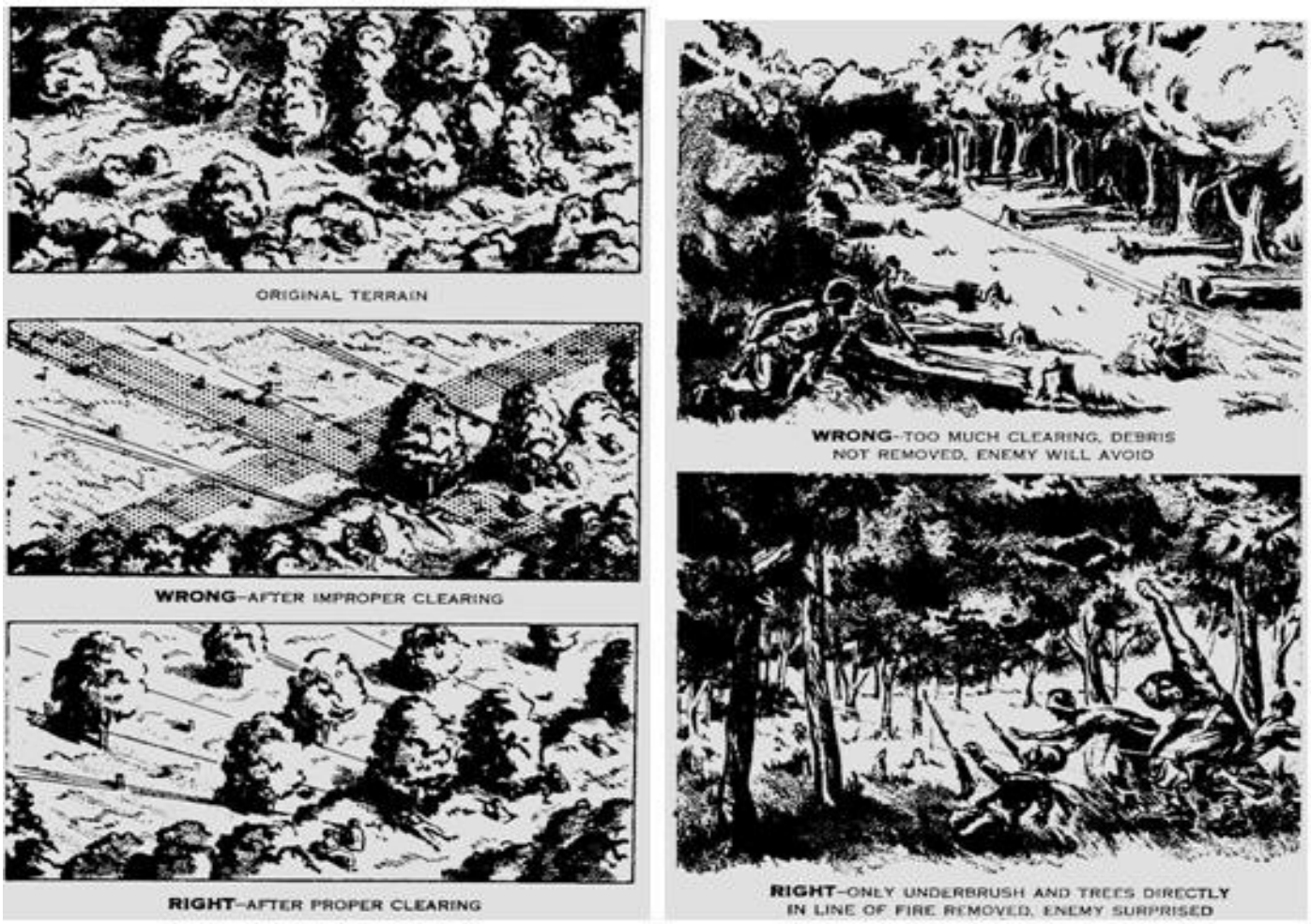
Cover From Sight: This means making it hard for snipers to see people at your retreat site. If you are not visible to a sniper, you are not going to be shot at. This is achieved by using sight barriers, such as curtains or shutters. Since windows are great places for snipers to acquire targets, every window in every retreat building should have curtains or shutters, and they should always be in use. During the day, a lighter curtain (that you can see through from the inside, but that blocks the view from outside) is adequate, but from dusk until dawn heavy drapes or blackout curtains should be used. Snipers also try to shoot targets as they stand at doorways, so every exterior door in every retreat building should also be blocked from view. There are several ways to do this, including installing a solid sight barrier (like a section of privacy fence) a few feet in front of each door, building an open fence (chain link, chicken wire, or a lattice of posts and sticks) in front of each door which will be covered with cloth, or with ivy or other climbing vines, or hanging camo netting in front of each door. Snipers will also try to target people as they travel between buildings, so the most commonly used pathways, such as between your house and barn, should have sight cover, such as a privacy fence. This is why it is also a good idea to connect your buildings and positions with covered crawl trenches, so you can move back and forth as needed, without getting shot at in the process. Finally, outdoor areas where you are going to be spending significant amounts of time, such as a garden, should be surrounded by privacy fencing. The cheapest fence is improvised using tree limbs as posts, and smaller branches as lattice sticks, then planting climbing vines all around the border.

Light Security: To avoid giving snipers a convenient, well-lit target, your group should follow strict light security measures. Heavy curtains, blankets, or shutters should cover every window and exterior door before dusk, and you should check your buildings from the outside, to make sure no light is visible. Any exterior lights should not be mounted on the buildings themselves, and they should not light up the retreat area itself. Instead, exterior lights should be set on fences and posts away from the buildings, and should point away from the retreat, so that they light up the surrounding area, not the retreat area. If you don't have directional lights, you can nail up a square of plywood behind each light, to shade the retreat area. With this type of lighting in place, snipers looking towards the retreat at night are blinded by the lights pointing at them. If they shoot out the lights, it will alert your group. Be careful not to give your position away at night by unnecessary use of flashlights or hand-held spotlights. Remember that shining a flashlight onto a fellow group member at night may very well get them shot. If you are traveling at night and need a flashlight to see by, you can use a trick invented by the Vietnam tunnel rats. They would tape their flashlight to a stick when clearing the dark tunnels, so that ambushers who saw the light come around a bend in the tunnel would shoot at the wrong place. Using a red filter on your flashlight, or using the red LEDs found on some LED flashlights, will make you less visible, while also preserving your eye's natural night vision abilities. This is why the military uses red lights to do things at night, such as reading maps and checking equipment. Firing ports in your fighting positions should also have blackout curtains, so you can use a light without revealing your position.

Defense strategies include removing natural cover the enemy could use, and treating every encounter as a potential ambush.

Reducing Available Cover For The Enemy: While you will not want to clear-cut and bulldoze the area around your retreat location, it is important to scout the terrain from the enemy's viewpoint, and remove any features which would provide an attacker with good cover. If a feature can't be removed, it can be outfitted with anti-personnel obstacles, such as barbed wire or nail boards, or booby-trapped, or both. Heavily wooded areas are normally thinned out just enough to create what the army calls cleared fields of fire. This just means you should remove enough cover to be able to see and shoot the enemy, without removing so much that it alerts them to a trap.

Start at your fighting position and work outwards, clearing sight obstacles in 100 yard wide arcs, like those on a range card. Large trees should not be cut down; instead prune the lower branches up to six feet above the ground. Smaller trees can be pruned or removed as needed. Freshly cut stumps or limbs can be darkened by smearing them with mud, to make them less obvious. Brush should be completely removed if possible, or at least well-thinned. Tall weeds and grass should also be cut down. All of the tree limbs, brush, weeds, and grass which were trimmed must be removed and disposed of, to avoid giving away your positions. Excess clearing, or leaving cut material lying around, makes your positions easy to spot. Tree limbs can be cut up for firewood, or used to make fences, or overhead cover. Smaller material can be composted or burned.


ORIGINAL TERRAIN
WRONG–AFTER IMPROPER CLEARING
RIGHT–AFTER PROPER CLEARING
WRONG–TOO MUCH CLEARING, DEBRIS NOT REMOVED, ENEMY WILL AVOID
RIGHT–ONLY UNDERBRUSH AND TREES DIRECTLY IN LINE OF FIRE REMOVED, ENEMY SURPRISED

Once clearing has been completed, an observer should watch from the firing position while other group members try to find cover in the cleared area. This will help you spot any problem areas which need more clearing. Also look for rises or dips in the ground which can hide prone attackers. These areas can be neutralized as enemy cover by adding obstacles or traps, or making an extra fighting position which has a view of these areas, or both.

Response Plans: There are two basic types of response plans which your group needs to develop and practice, one for when intruders are detected, and one for when your group is attacked without any advance warning. Note carefully that it is not enough to have these plans; your team must routinely practice your responses, just like a fire drill, so that your group will be conditioned to take the correct actions while under the stress of an actual attack.

Intruders Detected: When intruders are spotted, your group members must be alerted quickly, so that they can stop what they are doing, and man their assigned defensive positions. Every encounter should be treated as a potential ambush attempt, no matter how innocent the intruders appear. There will never be a more prudent time to exercise a little rational paranoia, than during a long-term survival situation. The trick for most people is knowing how to be cautious enough, because taking needless chances, like exposing yourself unnecessarily, can get you shot.

If a group member sees anything unusual, you should respond the same way that you would if intruders were spotted: sound the alert and go into defensive mode. For instance, if you are patrolling and find a backpack, the correct response is to activate your defense plan – DO NOT investigate the object first, as it may be a lure to get you to expose yourself to sniper fire, and it may also be booby-trapped with a grenade, or other explosive.

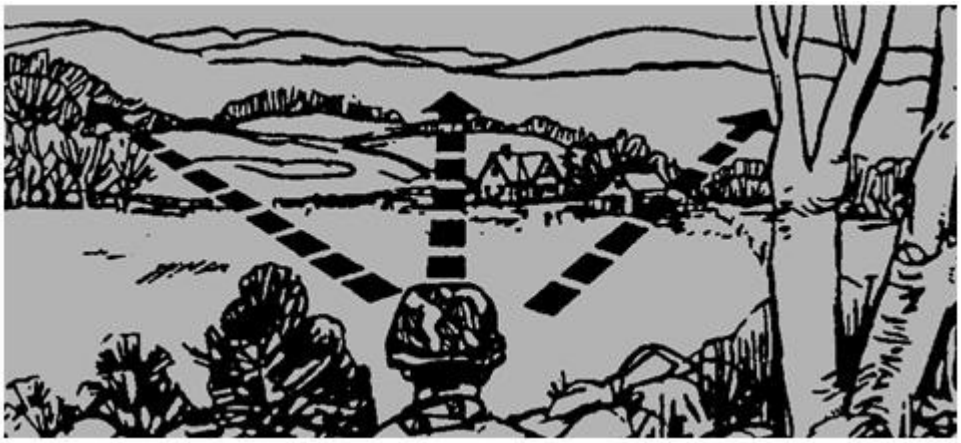
There are many ploys that could be used to set up an ambush against your group. These include things like leaving objects, such as a pack, a rifle, or a dead body or dead animal, in the ambush zone, to tempt you to investigate, or having an innocent-looking child, or wounded-looking person, show up at your front gate. No matter what turns up, the wise thing to do is to operate from a position of strength. These tactics can also be used to distract your group, while attackers try to invade your retreat from a different direction, so keeping your guard up is critical.

So, if a distraught mother shows up at your front gate with a bloody baby in her arms and you want to help her, your group should stay in your defensive positions and stay on guard, while one group member verbally directs the visitor to a covered evaluation point, without exposing themselves. Once in the evaluation point, you can find out if she is holding a baby or a bomb, without having to risk being shot at by any hidden ambushers.

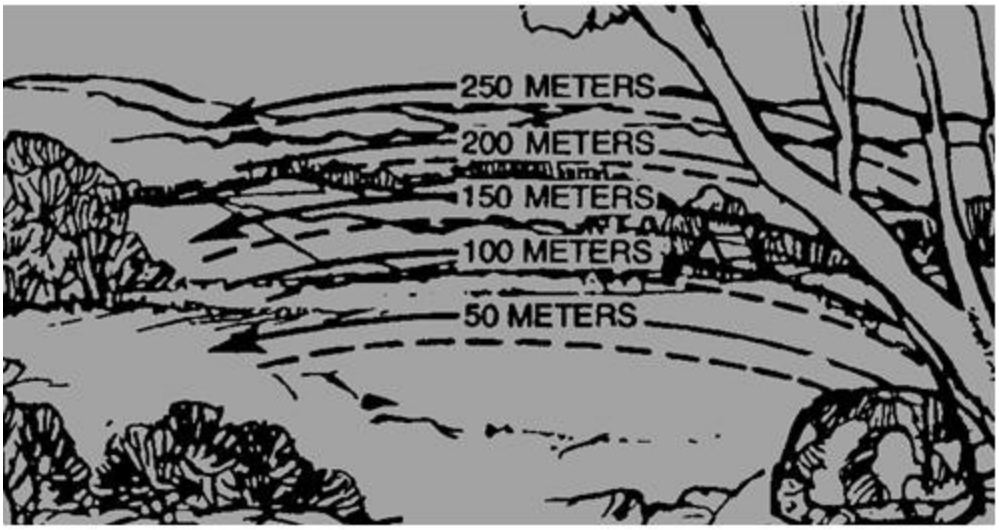
Attack Detected: If your group comes under attack without warning, then the enemy has gotten into sniper range without being spotted. If you hear gunshots, or if you see a fellow group member fall over (or both), you must immediately dive for the nearest available cover, while alerting your fellow group members to do the same. Remember that a single gunshot may mean that one of your group has just been killed, and you could lose another person every few seconds, so taking cover is vital, and must be done first. Once under cover, you must alert the rest of your group, and move to your defensive positions. Any non-combatants in your group, such as children and the elderly, should be moved into an underground shelter, where food and water are available. Having bunks and a toilet in such a shelter is also advisable. When your group is in your defensive positions, you can start to look for intruders, while checking to see if anyone has been injured, and find out if anyone is missing. If any of your people were killed or incapacitated, their role in your defense plans will have to be performed by someone else.

As soon as everyone is safe and accounted for, your group can begin defense mode operations. Basically, you will be trying to spot your attackers from the safety of your fighting positions, so that you can kill them. If this sounds harsh, consider that these are not casual refugees; they will already have killed (or tried to kill) some of your group, and you won't have the option of calling the police. It will be up to your group to eliminate the threat by yourselves. Note that how long you will have to remain in the defense mode will vary considerably from one attack to another. If attackers are so well-concealed that they can't be spotted, you may be in defense mode for days, or even weeks. This is why fighting positions should have supplies stored in them, and why it is best to connect your buildings and positions with crawl trenches. If you can't find and eliminate the attackers quickly, you must be prepared to beat them with a combination of good tactics and patience. This is no easy task, but it is your lives that are at stake here.

To have the best chance of spotting attackers, you need to use a logical, systematic method of searching. This consists of looking out of your firing port using your scoped rifle (or other optics), and scanning the visible area in a pattern. The first and fastest pattern to use is called the fast overall method. Start from just in front of your position and scan the terrain in strips out to the horizon, working from one side to the other, until you have scanned the entire area. If you can't see the enemy on this first attempt, you have to switch to the second method of searching.

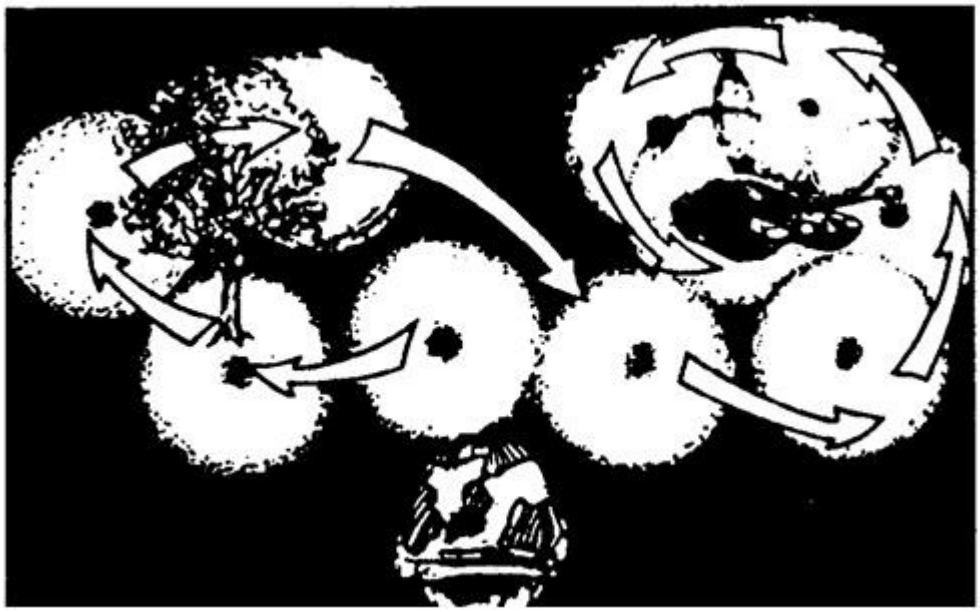


Using the fast overall search method to scan for attackers.



Using the overlapping strip search method to scan for attackers.

The second search pattern is called the overlapping strip search method. You scan the area in 100 yard arcs, in the same way that your range card is laid out. Start with the closest 100 yard arc, and then work your way outwards. Give the entire area a quick scan this way. If you can't see the enemy with this technique, you have to repeat the scan, only going slower, and searching in greater detail. You will now have to assume that your foes are mostly concealed by available cover, so you will have to be looking for anything exposed, such as a face or rifle partly concealed behind a tree trunk, or hiding in brush, or perhaps a carelessly exposed boot. If your second attempt fails to locate the enemy, you will then have to assume that they are very well concealed, or even wearing a ghille suit, and start a very slow, very detailed third scan. This time you should look for anything subtle that doesn't look right. Even the best camouflage ghille suit is only designed to blend in with one specific background, so odds are that camouflaged intruders can still be spotted, if you scan slowly and carefully enough. You should also be watching for movement, and light reflections. Keep in mind that if all the bushes are swaying in the wind, any one bush that is not moving in the same way bears closer scrutiny. Concentrate on areas that would give attackers the most cover. Look for any other sign of intruders, such as footprints or trampled grass, broken branches or dying vegetation, and discarded shell casings, food wrappers, or other trash. Closer attackers will be easier to locate using these methods, because it is harder to see small details from a distance, even with good optics. This is part of the reason that better-trained snipers will attack from farther away; the combination of distance and camouflage keeps them safer. If you spot anything suspicious, you can fire a test shot at the suspect area, and watch for any movement or other reaction. Just be sure not to waste ammo by shooting at every bush you can see. Exercise your patience and self-control here.


Using the natural night vision search method to scan for attackers.

Night Tactics: If you could not find and eliminate your attackers before nightfall, then you will have to use good tactics for night-time combat. The eyes have some inherent night vision abilities, but you have to be in the dark for an hour or more before they become fully adjusted, and then any white light will disrupt this ability for another hour or so, but red light will not. This means use red filters on any lights you may have to use. Also be sure to put blackout curtains on your firing ports before using any lights, to keep from revealing your position to the enemy.

When searching for attackers in the dark, look around objects in a circular pattern, rather than directly at them. The eyes see things in the dark more clearly this way. Remember to close your eyes just before firing any weapons, so that the muzzle flash doesn't ruin your night vision. If you have any infrared night vision equipment, it can help spot attackers even if they are in full ghille suits, because you can see their heat signatures. Of course if they have infrared equipment, they can try to spot your team in the same way, but being inside your fighting positions will conceal the bulk of your body heat. The enemy will probably use the cover of darkness to change position, advance or withdraw, and watch for targets, and this may be how they got within attack range to begin with. This is why it is important to keep a constant watch for intruders, even at night.

The enemy is more likely to make mistakes at night. They may leave tracks, trash, or disturbed vegetation when they move, if they couldn't see well enough to cover up their activities. Look for these signs the next day, even if you did a thorough search the previous day. Attackers may also violate light security and give away their locations to your observers, due to carelessness, or lack of skills. Be ready to take advantage of any such opportunities to end the sniper threat. Firing your gun at night can show your position (due to muzzle flash), so always move after firing.

Waiting It Out: If your group has been attacked and you took up your defensive positions, but you have not been able to locate your attackers, you will have to wait it out. This will be difficult advice for some people to follow, but it is extremely important. Consider that your odds of being attacked by skilled snipers is very low, so if you can make it through the first such attack by using patience and good tactics, you will probably never have to face a second one. Also, if your group has followed the advice in this article, you will be in a good position to withstand a sniper siege. Your group will be safely in their positions, and they will have the ability to communicate, move back and forth in the crawl trenches (while staying concealed), and they can take turns watching, while being able to eat, rest, or sleep in shifts. This puts you in a much better position than your attackers, who have to try to avoid being spotted, and who will have limited supplies. How long you keep your defenses up will be up to you to decide, but it is always best to err on the side of caution when your life is at stake.

The good news is that you will have plenty of time to question your fellow group members, to learn what they saw or heard, and compare notes to estimate the general location where the attack may have come from. If you have solid proof of an attack, say because a bullet hit a group member or a retreat building, I advise staying in defense mode until the attackers are eliminated, no matter how long this might take. After all, what else is more important than keeping your team alive? You should be able to stay safe until your attackers give up and withdraw, expose themselves and get eliminated, or until they die of thirst or exposure.

Killing the Enemy: Once you have located an attacker, you have to shoot and kill them. This is not as easy as you might think, for several reasons. Studies have shown that there are many professional soldiers in every standing army who will not shoot at the enemy, even in the thick of combat. Up to half of all infantry will not fire their weapons, or will shoot blindly, without aiming. Ninety percent of all the bullets fired in wars never hit any targets.

You need to find out if you and your fellow group members can actually take out an attacker now, not while you are under siege. Many modern people have never killed anything, so you should test your team members by having them kill animals. Start with chickens that you can eat afterwards, and work up in size, using rabbits, pigs, lambs, goats, and perhaps a cow; animals that can be used to feed the group. Many people are surprised when they find out that animals seldom just fall over dead when they are shot or stabbed, but struggle until they bleed out.

Don't try forcing those who can't handle it; they may take longer to adjust, if ever. These folks should not be depended on as combatants, but they can still be useful as observers. Those who have the killer instinct should practice on realistic-looking, human-shaped targets, such as anatomical targets, photo-realistic hostage situation targets, and manikins. Hunting is another way to keep your skills current, while providing food for your group.

The other problem with killing the enemy is that you may not be able to confirm the kill easily, and you may never be able to say for certain that the threat is over. When you hit an attacker, you have to assume that they are only wounded. So to increase your odds of making a kill, any attacker that you shoot should be shot at least three times. Three hits from a thirty caliber rifle will make a kill a near certainty, as long as the target is given plenty of time to bleed out; which means giving them enough time to die from loss of blood, or hydraulic failure. Once you shoot an attacker, your group needs to stay in your positions and observe, for a good long time. You will be looking for any sign of life from the attacker, and scanning for any other attackers. Watch to see if anyone tries to recover the dead man's weapon, or tries to retreat. Other attackers may give themselves away by trying to contact the dead one.

Dead Bodies: Dead people can be dangerous to your health. Once a person dies, the immune system suddenly stops operating, so all of the germs inside the body are then free to multiply without opposition. This means that any dead people, whether friend or foe, should be treated as dangerous disease vectors, and handled with as much caution as possible. You will not have access to modern embalming supplies, so bodies should be buried as soon as possible, and anyone who handles them should wear gloves, goggles, masks, and aprons or coveralls, if available. It would be tragic to defeat an attacker, only to be killed by their diseased corpse afterwards. Bodies can also be burned, but it will take a lot of wood to do the job properly, and the smoke will give away your position, so burial is better.

False Alarms, and Training: What if you activated your defenses after hearing a gunshot, but haven't spotted any enemies after days of patiently watching? Have you been wasting your time? I would have to say no. For example, if a hunter got close to your retreat and triggered your defenses by shooting at a deer, there was still a stranger near your retreat who was armed with a rifle. Following your defense plan in such a circumstance is not only prudent, it also qualifies as a valuable training experience for your group. How you look at things is mostly a matter of choice, so choose to see false alarms in a positive light, and spend some time considering how things might go if you don't follow your defense plans. A sniper attack on an unprepared group is an ugly experience that should be avoided.

Training your group to respond correctly should be done on a regular basis. One or more of your group members can act as simulated "snipers", looking for holes in your defense and trying to target your retreat from various distances, and while wearing various amounts of camouflage. You should also have your group practice coping with the simulated "death" of one or more team members during a simulated attack, especially those who tend to assume the leadership roles. Make sure all critical tasks can be carried out by more than one group member, so that your team is not crippled if you lose someone with a specialized skill. Any training you do along these areas will only help your group to be better able to live through the real thing.

Getting extremely familiar with how things normally look from your firing positions at different times of the day, and in each of the four seasons, will be a tremendous help when it is time to look for hidden enemies. Remember that time is on your side; don't be in any hurry to go out and pick up weapons and equipment from dead enemies. Expend the effort to keep your group's morale as high as possible, as living through these experiences will be particularly hard on some of your group members.

Surviving a sniper attack is possible, but it takes time and effort to create a solid defense, and to train your group how to respond effectively. Snipers prefer targets who are unprepared, and who panic when attacked, because it makes their job much easier. If you follow these suggestions and prepare your group correctly, they will have the best chance of defeating such an attack, and you will have done as much as possible to put the odds in your favor.